

Career Path

Diverse skills a ladder to the top

by Wing Kei



Tony Leung, chair of external affairs and public concerns committee, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Hong Kong
Photo: Lewis Wong

The economic growth in China has been inextricably linked with the development of the country's infrastructure. That, in turn, has given a tremendous boost to the surveying profession. Experts with the appropriate skills and qualifications have been needed to advise on everything from sites and valuations to construction, installation and contractual details.

One person who has witnessed this and continues to be positive about developments in China is Tony Leung, chair of external affairs and public concerns committee for the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Hong Kong. He believes that general construction work and new infrastructure projects will create numerous opportunities in the years ahead for the roughly 5,000 surveyors in Hong Kong.

With close to 30 years' experience in the profession, Dr Leung has already had the chance to work on a wide range of residential, commercial and hotel projects in both Hong Kong and the mainland. "I started working for what is now the Lands Department in 1976 and that is where I really learned about the basics of the business and got the necessary qualifications," he says.

It also set him up for successful spells with several large property developers and surveying companies, which included Hong Kong Land, Hysan Development, Lai Sun Development, Ryoden Development and Chesterton Petty (Chartered Surveyors). In 1994 though, Dr Leung decided to step out on his own and became managing director of TL Property Consultants International Ltd.

Four disciplines

Dr Leung points out that there are four main disciplines within the profession - general practice, quantity, building and land surveyors. "In Hong Kong, government projects still provide a lot of work for general practice, building and land surveyors, while in China, quantity and general practice surveyors are now especially in demand," he says.

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For those who want to follow a slightly different career path, openings can also be found with property developers. Usually, such roles require corporate and business sense and more day-to-day management responsibilities. This is in addition to having the relevant professional expertise and an understanding of strategic planning, government regulations and company law. "Surveyors accepting such posts have to recognise that they will be dealing with internal company matters as much as with external contacts and clients," Dr Leung says.

Into the North

Reflecting on the speed of development in China, he notes that surveyors planning to work there must be ready to use different industry jargon and adapt to a different set of cultural standards. "It's important to accept that some things will not be the same and to remember that the best way to make progress is by looking for common beliefs and things which work to mutual benefit," he says. Besides that, he emphasises that anyone committed to advancing their career in the mainland must expect to travel frequently. The country may be spoken of as a single market but, in reality, each project in each city is

unlike any others.

"As a surveyor, you are representing the profession at all times," Dr Leung says. "It may take years to get the required qualifications and the necessary on-the-job experience, but the satisfaction comes from being able to see the roads, bridges and buildings that are there as a result of your hard work."

He adds that a good surveyor should also have certain personal qualities. These include initiative, self-confidence, a sense of responsibility and the willingness to accept new challenges. The other essentials are to handle clients well, to have a very systematic approach to work, and to be a real team player.

"The job is not about taking instructions, but about applying skills, planning ahead and anticipating difficulties," he says. "Many surveyors are now qualified in more than one discipline, which is a sign of their dedication and of how the profession is developing."

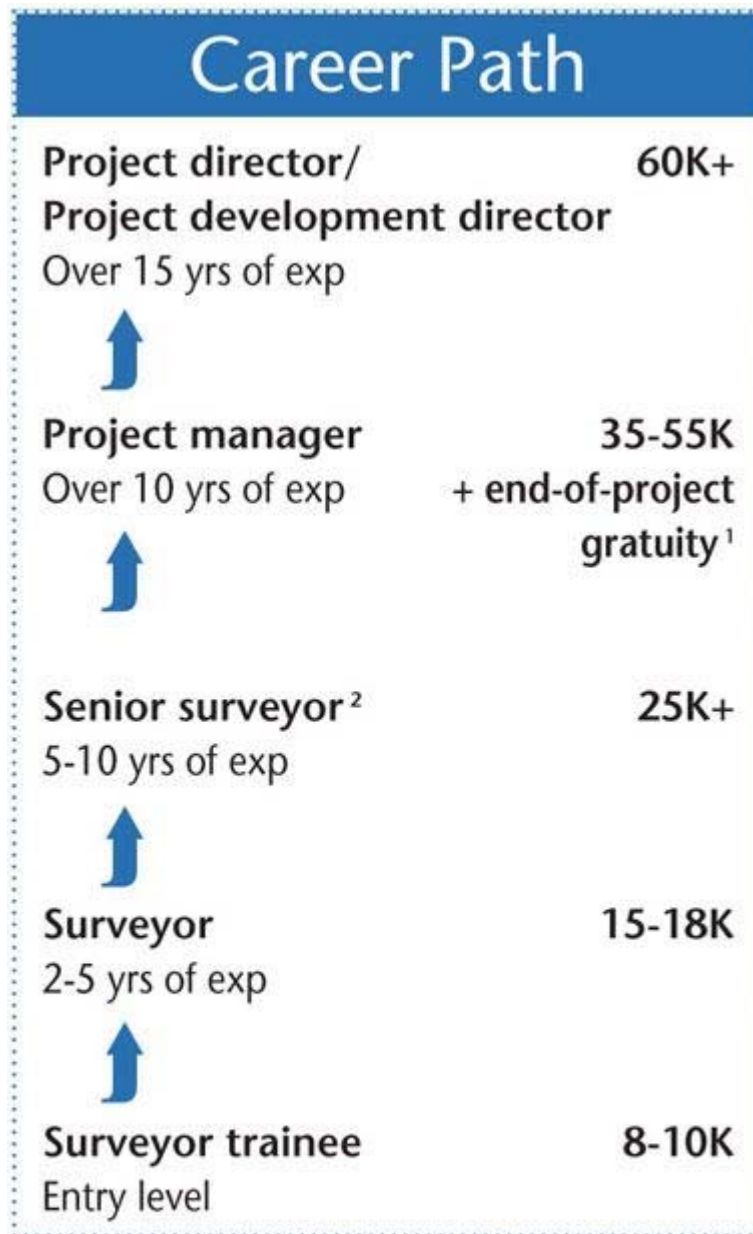
China Opportunities



With the mainland's construction boom showing few signs of slowing, there are many openings on offer for surveyors in all the main disciplines within the profession. Recently, attention has been on new opportunities in valuation, real estate agency, property and facilities management, and consultancy. These diverse roles may be with property developers, construction companies, or even with financial institutions, which may need additional expertise in

understanding the technicalities of real estate deals.

The qualifications required to work as a professional surveyor on the mainland will be similar to those needed in Hong Kong. Regarding salaries, Dr Leung notes, "It's hard to say because that will depend on the job requirements."



Figures are for reference only

1 Average project based salary scale

2 Qualified Surveyors with at least five years' surveying experience and have finished all examination papers

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